

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 L-03 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15

CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 DODE-00 OMB-01 PRS-01 /053 W

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R 291834Z JUN 77

FM AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3084

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRIDGETOWN 1515

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, AC

SUBJ:OPPOSITION POSITION ON MILITARY FACILITIES IN ANTIGUA

REF: BRIDGETOWN 1466

1. WHILE VISITING ANTIGUA ON JUNE 27, I MET WITH A DELEGATION FROM THE PROGRESSIVE LABOR MOVEMENT (PLM) WHO HAD ASKED TO SEE ME IN ORDER TO PRESENT THE OPPOSITION'S VIEWS ON THE ON-GOING NEGOTIATIONS FOR A NEW AGREEMENT ON THE US MILITARY FACILITIES IN ANTIGUA. THE TWO PRINCIPAL MEMBERS OF THE DELEGATION WERE FORMER PREMIER GOERGE H. WALTER, WHO IS NOW LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, AND DONALD HALSTEAD, CHAIRMAN OF THE PLM.

2. HALSTEAD ARGUED THAT, GIVEN THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FACILITIES TO ANTIGUA AND THE FACT THAT HIS PARTY REPRESENTED THE MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE (THE PLM DID, IN FACT, WIN SLIGHTLY MORE THAN HALF THE POPULAR VOTE IN THE LAST GENERAL ELECTION), THE ANTIGUAN NEGOTIATING TEAM SHOULD INCLUDE MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION. HE URGED THAT THE USG BREAK OFF NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE GOA UNTIL THE LATTER AGREED TO PLM PARTICIPATION. IN ADDITION, HE EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT THE MONEY TO BE GIVEN THE GOA IN RENTAL PAYMENTS

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WOULD BE USED TO CREATE JOB OPPORTUNITIES WHICH WOULD BE AVAILABLE ONLY TO GOVERNMENT SUPPORTERS.

3. I TOLD THE DELEGATION THAT I DID NOT SEE HOW THE USG COULD PROPERLY SEEK TO INFLUENCE THE COMPOSITION OF THE ANTIGUAN NEGOTIATING TEAM OR THE WAY IN WHICH THE GOA SPENT THE RENTAL PAYMENTS. ANY EXPRESSION OF OPINION

BY THE USG ON EITHER OF THESE MATTERS WOULD CONSTITUTE UNDUE INTERFERENCE IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF ANTIGUA. HALSTEAD DISAGREED, REMARKING THAT, SINCE THE MATTER DIRECTLY CONCERNED THE USG, A CHARGE OF INTERFERENCE WOULD NOT STAND UP. HE ADDED THAT, IF THE PLM WERE NOT INVOLVED IN THE NEGOTIATIONS, IT WOULD NOT FEEL BOUND BY THE RESULTING AGREEMENT. I REPLIED ONLY THAT I WOULD INFORM WASHINGTON OF THE PLM'S POSITION.

4. IN CONCLUSION, HALSTEAD GAVE ME A COPY OF A RESOLUTION SETTING FORTH THE POINTS OUTLINED ABOVE AND TOLD ME THAT A COPY OF THIS DOCUMENT HAD ALSO BEEN GIVEN TO THE DEPUTY BRITISH GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVE IN ANTIGUA. HE ALSO GAVE ME A LETTER ADDRESSED TO THE "US AMBASSADOR" AND SIGNED BY HIMSELF, IN WHICH HE CITED A STATEMENT ALLEGEDLY MADE BY PREMIER VERE C. BIRD, SR., ON JUNE 13, AND TOOK ISSUE WITH THE CRITICISM IN THAT STATEMENT TO THE EFFECT THAT, IN HALSTEAD'S WORDS, "THE PLM ADMINISTRATION, WHILE IN OFFICE, CONSPIRED WITH YOUR GOVERNMENT (I.E., THE USG) TO DEPRIVE (THE PEOPLE OF ANTIGUA) OF SOCIAL BENEFITS TO WHICH THEY WERE ENTITLED UNDER THE AGREEMENT."

5. COPIES OF THE TWO PLM DOCUMENTS BEING POUCHED TO THE DEPARTMENT.

6. COMMENT: WALTER, HALSTEAD ET AL DID NOT SPECIFICALLY STATE THAT THE OPPOSITION WOULD REPUDIATE THE AGREEMENT, CONFIDENTIAL

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AND I BELIEVE THEY REALIZE THAT, GIVEN THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FACILITY TO THE ANTIGUAN ECONOMY, THEY COULD NOT DO SO IF THEY WISHED. FEELINGS BETWEEN THE GOA AND OPPOSITION ARE VERY STRONG, HOWEVER, AND THE LATTER'S DEMARCHE WAS NO DOUBT MOTIVATED LARGELY BY THE HOPE OF EMBARRASSING THE FORMER. FROM NEUTRAL SOURCES, I HAVE HEARD THE REPORT THAT THE GOA HAS REPRESENTED THE RENTAL PAYMENTS AS A WINDFALL FOR LOYAL MEMBERS OF THE RULING PARTY.  
END COMMENT  
SIMMS

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## Message Attributes

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Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
22 May 2009  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009